

Perfectionist Community Building  
(Oneida Community Mansion House)  
Kenwood Avenue, Kenwood Station  
Oneida Vicinity  
Madison County  
New York

HABS No. NY-5616

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
PERFECTIONIST COMMUNITY BUILDING  
(ONEIDA COMMUNITY MANSION HOUSE)

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Location: Kenwood Avenue, Kenwood Station, Madison County  
Oneida vicinity, New York

Present Owner: Oneida Limited

Present Occupant: Oneida Limited and descendants of the Oneida  
Community

Present Use: Residences and apartments

Brief Statement  
of Significance: The only surviving structure of those built by  
John Humphrey Noyes for his communistic society  
that settled in Oneida in 1848.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners:  
1848 - land purchased by Oneida Community from State of  
New York (part of the land purchased in 1840 by  
the State of New York from the Oneida Indians).
2. Date of erection: Big Hall Section 1861; Kitchen  
Dining Wing 1863; South Wing 1869; New  
House 1878; Lounge 1914.
3. Architect: Big Hall Section, Kitchen-Dining and  
South Wing by Mr. Hamilton, a Community  
member; New House by a firm of architects in  
New York City; Lounge by T. H. Skinner.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: The Big Hall  
Section contained the main entrance, reception  
rooms, the Lower Sitting Room, the library,  
and, upstairs, the Big Hall (used for religious  
meetings and entertainment -- it was a double  
story with balcony on three sides) and the  
Upper Sitting Room (also two stories with  
balconies). Small sleeping rooms were on the  
third floor off the balconies. The Kitchen  
Dining Wing was connected by a tunnel to the  
Big Hall Section. The South Wing housed the  
children who had been living in a separate

wooden building known as the Children's House. From the age of one, all children lived in this wing until they were graduated at twelve years of age. The New House was primarily a dormitory with some sitting rooms. The Lounge, built after the break-up of the community, was used for recreation and leisure purposes.

5. Builder, suppliers, etc.: Big Hall Section, Kitchen-Dining Wing, and South Wing were built by community members; New House and Lounge by outside contractors.
6. Alterations and additions: Most of the rooms and exterior are unaltered, except for the bedrooms that have been combined to make small apartments with modern bathrooms.

B. Historical Events or Persons Connected with Structure: John Humphrey Noyes organized one of the most communistic societies in America in Putney, Vermont, in 1830's. Forced to leave there, he and his followers (51 in 1848) settled in Oneida on approximately 654 acres of land. In 1848 they began building their first Mansion House, a frame structure that was torn down after the present building was erected. By 1849 there were 172 members. The community prospered economically by the manufacture and sale of steel traps and chains.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Bibliography:

Noyes, Pierrepont. My Father's House. New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1937. pp. 3-158.

Oneida Circular. Oneida: Oneida and Wallingford Communities, date unknown, page unknown.

Parker, Robert A. A Yankee Spirit. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1935. pp. 160-77, 241.

Robertson, Constance. The Oneida Community, an Autobiography. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1970.

\_\_\_\_\_. The Oneida Community: The Break-Up. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1972.

2. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated: The George Arents

Research Library, Syracuse University, Syracuse,  
New York, has an outstanding collection of original  
and printed material on the Oneida Community.

Prepared by Susan Bushnell,  
student State University of  
New York at Cortland May  
1964

PART II. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records are part of the documentation of structures in the  
Southern Tier of New York State, undertaken by HABS in cooperation  
with the Broome County Historical Society and the Valley Development  
Foundation, Inc.

The project was under the general supervision of John Poppeliers,  
Chief, Historic American Buildings Survey. The historical material  
was prepared by Susan Bushnell, May, 1964. The project was edited for  
deposit in the Library of Congress by Constance Werner Ramirez,  
April, 1974.